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A Step Toward Falling

by [Cammie McGovern](#)



Critics' Opinion:

[First Published:](#)

Oct 2015, 368 pages

[Young Adult](#)

Readers' Opinion:
Not Yet Rated

[Paperback:](#)

Dec 2016, 368 pages

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Book Reviewed by:
[Bradley Sides](#)

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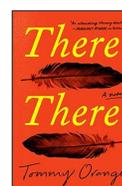
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Arts Education Empowers Youth with Disabilities

This article relates to [A Step Toward Falling](#).

Aristotle once said, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." Those words were uttered nearly 2,400 years ago, but they are still relevant today. Education that gives meaning is the kind of learning that we remember. Today, art education is one place where teenagers learn about the world surrounding them and the more personal world within themselves. The arts capture our hearts, and this early introduction to creativity instills passions that can last a lifetime.



The power of the arts takes center stage in Cammie McGovern's *A Step Toward Falling*. McGovern's novel tells the story of Belinda, a cognitively disabled youth, who is assaulted during a high school football game. She suffers from the trauma of the incident. It is the joy of performing that brings Belinda back to her old self. During her childhood, she performed in numerous productions, and she was a star – both by her own acknowledgement and by others. As she gets older, though, finding a role is more difficult. The high school theatre director believes that Belinda's disability will prevent her from being able to perform onstage. With the help of two new friends, Belinda finds her way back to the spotlight. Her transformation is powerful to witness. The arts and her passion literally give Belinda her life back.

While the story of Belinda is purely fictional, there are others about people like Belinda, that are as real as real can get. The truth is that the arts, and especially the performing arts, are benefiting young disabled people – from children to teenagers – every day across America.

The impact of educational arts programs for disabled students is quite remarkable. Like with Belinda, these kinds of programs are truly life-affirming for so many young people. [Imagination Stage](#), "the largest and most respected multi-disciplinary theatre arts

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organization for young people in the Mid-Atlantic region," is one such program that is benefiting teenagers. Imagination Stage began in a single classroom, but it's now a complex organization. It "encourages children of all abilities to discover and develop their full creative potential through the performing arts." Students with disabilities get the chance to put on full theatrical productions.



In one success story from a mother with a fourteen-year-old son with Asperger Syndrome, she notes of her son's incredible progress from participating in Imagination Stage. She mentions her son's difficulty in socializing, but after appearing in a production of *Twelfth Night*, he was freely singing and dancing along with the other kids.



Another arts program for young people with developmental disabilities is [The Miracle Project](#). Created in California, this "musical theater workshop for teenagers with autism, learning disabilities, [and] special needs" now reaches as far as New York. The Miracle Project helps bring teenagers together in a safe setting to explore their desire to perform onstage. One parent, according to [MetroFocus](#), refers to the theatre environment at The Miracle Project as being like a "cocoon," where young people are able to act in an environment of "understanding and acceptance." In fact, this same mother saw her young daughter Katie "overcome a lot

of fears." Indeed, the arts are helping young people with disabilities soar to heights previously thought impossible.

Hopefully, with the help of these kinds of arts education programs, children and teenagers with disabilities will continue to have the chance to find themselves and grow. Art can inspire us and it can help make a life worth living. And sometimes, as in the case with Belinda, the arts can save us from the world's darkness. Who wouldn't want to be a part of something so wonderful?

Image of Imagination Stage logo, courtesy of [Imagination Stage](#)
Image of The Miracle Project logo, courtesy of [The Miracle Project](#)

Article by [Bradley Sides](#)

This "beyond the book article" relates to [A Step Toward Falling](#). It originally ran in November 2015 and has been updated for the December 2016 paperback edition.

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